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SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER MAKING PUSH ON COUNTERNARCOTICS
COORDINATION

¶1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: Minister of Interior Anibal Fernandez is making a public push to enhance counternarcotics cooperation and effectiveness in Argentina, initiating such ideas as a sole national registry for collecting CN information and analyzing trends, creating a scientific advisory committee on counternarcotics and complex crimes, and creating a specific training body for security forces in techniques for investigating narcotrafficking and organized crime. As part of the initiative to focus increasingly on trafficking networks, Fernandez also indicated a policy shift away from targeting narcotics users. On June 8, Fernandez convoked the Ambassadors of UK, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, the U.S. Charge, Bolivia, Brazil, Venezuela, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador to present what he characterized as a new initiative to promote greater cooperation and exchange of information on drug related issues as well as to promote the signing of new bilateral agreements for cooperation on CN issues with countries that do not already have such agreements with the GoA. He pointed to the agreements the MoI signed recently with Peru and Spain as models of what the GoA is seeking. Fernandez spoke briefly about these agreements as well as Mercosur agreements on the same issue. He said that he hoped that there could be not just better cooperation and communication bilaterally with Argentina but among the many countries that for Argentina are producer/transit and consumer countries. Fernandez highlighted the excellent and valued cooperation of the U.S. Mission and its focus on improving GoA and regional coordination in the fight against narcotrafficking. While much of the rollout was clearly for political effect, this Mission has been pursuing and advocating for some time most of what the Minister is proposing and we see the Minister's public highlighting of the CN problem as positive and providing momentum for moving forward with Post's CN initiatives. End Summary.

The Minister's Initiative

¶2. (U) On June 8, CDA attended a meeting with Interior Minister Anibal Fernandez, who convoked the Ambassadors of UK, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, US, Bolivia, Brazil, Venezuela, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador to present what he characterized as a new initiative to promote greater cooperation and exchange of information on drug related issues as well as to promote the signing of new bilateral agreements for cooperation on CN issues with countries that do not already have such agreements with the GOA. He pointed to the bilateral CN agreements Argentina signed recently with Peru and Spain as models of what the GOA is seeking. Fernandez spoke briefly about these agreements as well as Mercosur agreements on the same issue. He said that he hoped that there could be not just better cooperation and communication bilaterally with Argentina but among the many countries that for Argentina are producer/transit and consumer countries.

¶3. (U) In a report Fernandez provided the Charge and invited Ambassadors, he highlighted the need for much of what is already known about the fight against narcotrafficking, i.e. the need for close international coordination and an international legal framework that effectively targets the drug cartels and their money laundering mechanisms. He also noted the limitations of what he described as "repressive" policies focused too heavily on the first link in the narcotrafficking chain, resulting in courts and jails overwhelmed with small-time offenders and consumers. Instead, Fernandez, noted that the individual countries and

the international community should focus more attention on prevention and provide more assistance and services to consumers and efforts to reduce the damages resulting from narcotics consumption.

¶4. (SBU) Several times during his presentation, the Minister cited the excellent cooperation he has had from the U.S. Mission, particularly our DEA office, and how the Embassy has been focused on the issue of improving coordination among GoA entities, as well as between GoA entities and USG institutions like the DEA and FBI. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Under Secretary for Multilateral Affairs, Ambassador Raul Ricardes, who was present, said that the MFA would be involved in trying to promote this greater collaboration and exchange of information and would be getting back to embassies with parameters for expanded cooperation, bilaterally and multilaterally. He said that they would then look to individual countries to get back to the MFA and MoI on ideas on how to expand cooperation. Each Ambassador made brief statements on the level of cooperation already existent. Charge noted our Northern Border Task Force as an example of an effort whose main objective is improving the exchange of information (including with Bolivian authorities across the border from Salta/Jujuy) and coordination among different federal (both Argentine and U.S.) and provincial agencies.

¶5. (U) As part of his new focus on CN, the Minister has announced a shift away from what he described as the "failed policies" and short-term focus of going after consumers and small time dealers. The Minister has cited the high costs of prosecuting and jailing users and small time dealers; money he says that could be used more effectively for instance in the treatment of HIV patients, many of whom are drug addicts. Forty-five percent of cases in federal courts, the Minister stated, are drug related. All this, he noted, is taking the needed resources away from the more complex investigation of the trafficking networks.

New Legal Tools

¶6. (SBU) Fernandez also mentions in his report, without endorsing them, that various legal tools such as controlled deliveries, undercover agents and plea bargaining are being

contemplated. (Note: These are issues various Embassy agencies have raised with appropriate GoA and judicial officials for years as essential tools in combating narcotrafficking and related crimes. Actually, both controlled deliveries and undercover agents are contemplated under Argentine law; there is just no history or practice of using these tools and therefore a great reluctance by many judges and prosecutors to "risk" using these untried methods. Plea bargaining, however, is still not permitted under Argentine law. End Note.)

¶17. (U) The Minister has also issued a number of decrees recently in an effort to increase interagency coordination and standardize investigative and analytical practices. He has announced the creation of a Single Registry for the Analysis of NarcoTrafficking (RUAN) that will be responsible for the "design, development, implementation and maintenance" of a central data base to collect information on all narcotics-related complaints, investigations and evidence in drug trafficking-related cases. The existing Internal Security Council, which brings together representatives from the various security agencies, the Attorney General's office and provincial counterparts, will meet once a month to

specifically coordinate CN policy. A special "Training Group" will be formed under the auspices of the Criminal Intelligence Office of the MoI, comprised of specialized trainers from each of the security agencies to development, coordinate and implement the special investigative techniques involved in complex crimes related to narcotrafficking. The Minister has also created an "intern program" for provincial security personnel with federal agencies in order train provincial forces in investigative techniques.

¶18. (SBU) Comment: While there was nothing particularly new in the Minister's analysis of the current narcotrafficking situation or his recommendations for confronting it, his public highlighting of the situation is positive and his recognition of the need to better coordinate the GoA's CN activities facilitates the Embassy's CN efforts. The creation of central databases, the sharing of information between GoA security forces and regionally, training in specific investigative techniques, and proposed issues such as controlled deliveries and the complexities involved in developing an undercover capacity are all areas where this Mission is already working or is in active discussion with GoA counterparts.

WAYNE